

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

275 OAK ST. SUITE 150
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14203
PHONE: 716-856-6525 FAX: 716-856-6754
E-MAIL: tkniazuk@ecidany.com
www.erie.gov/enrp

Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership

Members:

James Allen
Hon. Vince Anello
Tim Doolittle
Hon. Wright Ellis
Matthew Enstice
Samuel Ferraro
Richard Geiger
Hon. Timothy Kennedy
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Maria Lehman
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Jo Nasoff-Finton
Hon. Sean O'Connor
Dr. Gary Praetzel
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David Rosenwasser
Hon. William Ross
Diane Ruzala
Laura St. Pierre
Christopher Schoepflin
Hon. Demone Smith
Hector Titus
Timothy Wanamaker
Peter Wendel

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Lawrence Witul

Administrator:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Strategic Plan

Committee: James Allen

Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Drew Cerza
Tim Doolittle
Samuel Ferraro
Maria Lehman
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hal Morse
Jo Nasoff

Dr. Gary Praetzel

David Rosenwasser
Hon. William Ross
Laura St. Pierre
John Sheffer, II
Hector Titus
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD
Peter Wendel (facilitator)
Tod Kniazuk (administrator)

The Goal

The Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership has been serving a unique role in the community since 1998. While we have been flexible in our strategy and membership over that time, no organized planning for the group has been undertaken since its inception. That, along with the fiscal crisis in Erie County and the retirement of one of the founding co-chairs (Hon. Gerald Meal), led ENRP leadership to convene a strategic planning committee.

That committee (whose members are listed above) convened for three sessions during summer, 2005. A draft report was written and sent to ENRP members and Erie and Niagara County legislators. This draft was reviewed by all four subcommittees at their September, 2005 meetings. Their comments and suggested revisions were again sent to members and legislators. The full membership discussed the draft and revisions at the October and December, 2005 general meetings, and at a January, 2006 strategic planning meeting. This, then, is the culmination of the process – a strategic plan for the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership for 2006 and beyond.

The Organization

ENRP is an ad hoc subcommittee of the Niagara and Erie County Legislatures, in partnership with multiple levels of government and other private and non-profit agencies. Further, ENRP is a non-

hierarchical collaborative network. There will be no changes to this structure.

Mission Statement

The Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership is a non-traditional regional collaborative forum for linking multiple organizations and initiatives, and also serves as a catalyst to identify and pursue opportunities to grow the region.

ENRP's Positive Core

- Non-traditional regional collaborative model of civic engagement
- Broad range of participants in a collaborative environment leading to diversity (of geography and interests)
- Demonstrated success in diverse models of engagements with specific projects
- Finding members to meet emerging issues
- A forum for addressing future issues
- Our ability to play multiple roles as a clearinghouse, advocate, forum, coordinator, incubator, project manager, implementer, catalyst, supporter, and advisor

ENRP's Successes (what we do well)

- Line of communication fostering positive relationships
- Bring politicians together with "real people"
- Expose ideas to a larger group
- Participation remains high
- No "threat" or turf wars involved, just a collaborative effort
- Provide a genuine help to agencies
- Identify needs of the area
- More than just talk
- "Doers" as opposed to "leaders" and that gets a lot more done
- Non-legislative members invest time and staff effort
- Civic engagement through non-traditional models are a common thread in successful regions – that's ENRP
- Product driven, not process driven
- Open environment; anyone can propose an idea or project
- People on committees can focus in on interest issues
- Multiple models for implementing
- Partnership with UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth is a reason for our success
- Clearinghouse of ideas
- Willing to take on some of the smaller initiatives

ENRP's Challenges

- Keeping continuity in the organization as members move on
- Securing permanent, reliable, and diverse funding
- Maintaining the respect and participation of the Niagara County Legislature, and fostering increased participation and interest from the Erie County Legislature
- Increasing diversity in the membership
- Keeping connected to the Erie County administration, while acknowledging that ENRP is a legislative initiative
- Securing permanent staffing
- Remaining nonpolitical and nonpartisan when tackling issues that have political overtones

Topic Areas

ENRP concentrates its efforts in the areas of economic development, government affairs, tourism and culture, and transportation. While acknowledging there are many additional important regional topics, no changes be made to ENRP's topic areas. We reaffirm, however, that ENRP members, county legislators and others should continue to bring forth ideas on any subject to the group.

Within the aforementioned topic areas, we act as a venue for discussing and/or acting on a wide range of projects and policies initiated by member agencies or others, and we also initiate projects and policies ourselves. This model will continue, and ENRP will continue to play multiple roles as a clearinghouse, advocate, forum, coordinator, incubator, project manager, implementer, catalyst, supporter, and advisor.

Process

Ideas can be brought forward by any member, county legislator, or member of the public. If first discussed at a general meeting, the idea is referred to one of the four committees by ENRP leadership. Once there, or if an idea is initiated at the subcommittee level, the subcommittee discusses the idea and brings it back to the general body for "concept approval." Essentially, the general group gives the okay for the concept to be developed into a policy or project. This too is done at the subcommittee level. The developed policy or project is then returned to the full membership for final approval. If legislative action is required, this is the time the policy or project would be forwarded to the legislatures. This process will be maintained, but it is also noted that one of the strengths of ENRP is that it is an agile, flexible network and not an overly rigid group. So, while some degree

of process is needed, it will be in support of the ideas, projects, and policies.

Membership

ENRP was originally comprised of 22 members; 10 of whom were county legislators. Over the years, we have grown to between 30 and 40, although we remain at 10 legislators. This growth happened organically. As we worked on projects or policies with outside agencies, oftentimes at the completion of the task the agency was invited to join the group. A good example of this was the Buffalo Niagara Tourist Express. We worked with the NFTA, BNCVB, Niagara County Tourism, and the Niagara Falls CVB on that project. They later all became member agencies. The one area where some direction was given to the growth was in making sure that membership remain equal between Niagara and Erie County (regional entities are counted separately).

New members that were added outside of the aforementioned process tend to be recruited by ENRP leadership and administration.

ENRP will continue to grow organically, with no set number of members. Further, membership shall remain equal between counties. ENRP leadership will develop a "wish list" of those they would like to add, then present this list to the membership to determine if any of the members could assist with the recruitment of those on the list. Finally, all members of ENRP are encouraged to suggest agencies or individuals for addition to the group.

Subcommittees

As mentioned previously, ENRP does the lion's share of its work at the subcommittee level. These subcommittees meet monthly (except prior to the first general meeting of the year, after the last general meeting of the year, and in August). Each subcommittee is chaired by a member of ENRP.

The structure of the subcommittees will remain in place, with one revision – all subcommittees will use agendas. All topics should be the responsibility of only one subcommittee; there should be no overlap. Also, the four subcommittee chairs will have periodic meetings as a group with ENRP leadership. This is to increase communication between the subcommittees, and to ensure that topics are not being discussed or developed in more than one subcommittee.

In addition to the four subcommittees, a sustainability committee will be created to develop ongoing fundraising strategies for the organization and its projects and policies. Those working on the sustainability committee will do so in addition to their membership on one of the four subcommittees.

General Meetings

Theoretically, ENRP holds general meetings every other month, commencing in January. Practically, however, in many years the first general meeting is held in February (or later) due to the process for confirming membership and leadership that takes place annually in the legislatures.

The general meetings consist of subcommittee reports in which concept approval or final approval is sought for action items and information is shared on discussions in the subcommittee, updates on important regional projects, an educational presentation on a topic of relevance (from a member agency or others), and old/new business.

The structure of the general meetings will remain in place, with increased opportunities for member agencies to discuss their activities. In order to keep the organization moving forward through the Legislatures' transition period at the beginning of each year, the first general meeting for the next year will be scheduled at the last general meeting of the current year, with co-chairs and members acting as hold-overs pending confirmation or revision by Legislature leadership.

Administration

At the time of its founding, ENRP was staffed through the efforts of the clerk of the Niagara County Legislature and a majority staff member at the Erie County Legislature. Within the first year administration was fully transferred to the staffer at the Erie County Legislature due to the range of responsibilities coupled with the small number of staff at the Niagara County Legislature. In 2003 administration of ENRP was transferred to the University at Buffalo Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth. As part of this agreement, the administrator of ENRP became an employee of the Institute. As of June 2005 this was no longer the case, as funding for the position had run out. The agreement with the Institute in terms of providing office space, phone and e-mail, and other support remained in place through October, 2005. Staffing is being provided on a voluntary basis by the administrator.

The current ENRP administrator will be retained and funded as a half-time position for 2006, with the goal of transitioning to a full-time position pending the success of our fundraising efforts.

As a bi-county organization, meetings of both the general body and the four subcommittees should be held in both Erie and Niagara Counties. Meetings will be hosted by the Niagara County Center for Economic Development and the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA). The ECIDA will also house the organization and its administrator. The position of administrator will be fully funded by

ENRP (which will fully reimburse ECIDA for the administrator's salary and fringes if applicable), and the ECIDA will provide office space, computer, phone, e-mail, copying, and other supplies and assistance as an in-kind donation. There will also be in-kind assistance from the Niagara County Center for Economic Development in areas such as clerical assistance and work space, to be requested as needed.

Funding

Prior to 2002, funding for ENRP administration was absorbed as part of the legislatures' staff budgets. Funding for projects also came largely from the legislatures. When administration was transferred to UB, funding came from the Erie and Niagara County Legislatures and the Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth (fringes and in-kind). The bulk of the funding came from Erie County, and so when the fiscal crisis hit that funding was lost. ENRP reaffirms the responsibility of the two county legislatures to fund ENRP as it is an ad hoc subcommittee of those bodies, but also recognizes that relying solely on those bodies for funding is no longer possible.

Therefore, all member agencies are asked to provide a membership fee to be determined by ENRP leadership toward a total annual budget of \$27,500. This amount would provide half time administration at \$25,000, as well as meeting and incidental expenses at \$2,500 (which will be in the form of in-kind donations). Funding from outside sources will also be actively pursued for both administration and projects. Further, Niagara County will use their grant writers to search for ENRP funding. To facilitate the acceptance of funding (especially grant funds), the Erie County Industrial Development Agency will accept funds on behalf of ENRP.

Should ENRP move to a full time staff position, the budget would increase to \$67,500; \$50,000 staff, \$15,000 fringes (at 30 percent), and \$2,500 meeting and incidental expenses (an in-kind donation).

Conclusion

Seven years into its existence, the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership remains a vital, unique organization in the two counties. The strategic plan retains the qualities of the organization that make it a success, and builds on those to achieve a refreshed and sustainable group for years to come.